



## GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR

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#### "Government rejects Opposition's statement on Swine Flu"

The Government disagrees with and rejects the Opposition's statement in which it said that there can no longer be any excuse for the absence of information as to what the vaccination priorities will be in Gibraltar. This statement ignores both the facts and the best medical practice as they affect Gibraltar.

Different countries are taking different approaches to fit their circumstances and the Opposition should not pick one or two of them and think that any different approach is wrong.

In the first place, most of the countries presently engaged in a public debate about prioritisation of cases, are doing so because either they do not intend to obtain vaccines for the whole population, or will experience delays in doing so, or because of the sizes of their populations, cannot realistically vaccinate their entire populations quickly even if they had enough vaccine.

This is not the case in Gibraltar because the Government moved quickly to get into the international queue to buy vaccines as soon as they become available from the manufacturers, and Gibraltar will therefore have enough vaccine for the whole of the population. Secondly, because of the size of our population a vaccination programme can be implemented quickly across the whole population, should that be considered to be necessary and desirable in due course.

Furthermore, the spread of the infection in Gibraltar has not followed the pattern of certain other countries mentioned by the Opposition, and the incidence of cases in Gibraltar is relatively low in comparison.

For all of these reasons Gibraltar does not need to prioritise to the same extent nor to rush into public information about prioritisation of categories of citizens. If need be everyone

can be vaccinated and therefore the need for the sort of prioritisation taking place elsewhere does not arise here at this time.

The effects of the vaccine are not yet clear. Any Government decision on the implementation of a vaccination programme will therefore involve a careful analysis and assesment of the possible risks of taking the vaccine (if any) against the extent of the threat posed by the swine flu virus. At present the virus is innocuous for the vast and overwhelming bulk of the population and a vaccination programme would be premature. The Government and the Government's Civil Contingency Committee, including the GHA Swine Flu Committee, keep the possible evolution of the virus and its consequences under constant review.

When appropriate the Government would deploy its vaccination Plan which already forms an existing part of Gibraltar's Pandemic Influenza Contingency Plan and provides for prioritisation should that be necessary. The Government does not propose to provide details of the Plan until nearer the time when the vaccination becomes available from the manufacturer, which is expected in mid October.

The Government, like many other people in Gibraltar prefers that the Swine Flu issue continue to be handled in Gibraltar calmly but effectively as has been the case to date. This involves continuing to issue public guidance, advice and information at the appropriate times, to avoid unnecessary and pointless alarm, anxiety and speculation.